

U.S. Department of Education

**Staff Report
to the
Senior Department Official
on
Recognition Compliance Issues**

RECOMMENDATION PAGE

1. **Agency:** Accreditation Council on Optometric Education (1952/2008)
(The dates provided are the date of initial listing as a recognized agency and the date of the agency's last grant of recognition.)
2. **Action Item:** Interim Report
3. **Current Scope of Recognition:** The accreditation in the United States of professional optometric degree programs, optometric technician (associate degree) programs, and optometric residency programs, and for the preaccreditation categories of Preliminary Approval for professional optometric degree programs and Candidacy Pending for optometric residency programs in Department of Veterans Affairs facilities.
4. **Requested Scope of Recognition:** Same.
5. **Date of Advisory Committee Meeting:** December, 2011
6. **Staff Recommendation:** Accept the report.
7. **Issues or Problems:** None.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE AGENCY

The American Optometric Association, Accreditation Council on Optometric Education (ACOE) accredits professional optometric degree (O.D.) programs, optometric technician (associate degree) programs, and optometric residency programs. The agency currently accredits 22 professional optometric degree programs, 5 optometric technician programs, and over 170 optometric residency programs. These programs are predominantly located throughout the United States and Puerto Rico, although a few of the programs are located outside of the United States.

The ACOE is a programmatic accreditor, and consequently is not required to meet the Secretary's "separate and independent" requirements. The agency's programs use the agency's accreditation to enable them to establish eligibility for federal programs under the Title VII Public Health Service Act and for participation in the Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Health Administration education and training program for optometry residency programs.

Recognition History

The American Optometric Association was first recognized by the U.S. Commissioner of Education in 1952. Since that time, the agency has been periodically reviewed and has been granted continued recognition.

ACOE last came before the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity for a full review in December 2007, and was subsequently granted continued recognition for a period of five years. The current report was also requested. (Originally, the agency was asked to submit its report in one year. However, due to passage of the HEOA, the agency's report was put on hold until the NACIQI was reconstituted and the report could be reviewed by the Committee.)

The Department received no third-party comments in connection with the agency's compliance report.

PART II: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

§602.16 Accreditation and preaccreditation standards

(a) The agency must demonstrate that it has standards for accreditation, and preaccreditation, if offered, that are sufficiently rigorous to ensure that the agency is a reliable authority regarding the quality of the education or training provided by the institutions or programs it accredits. The agency meets this requirement if -

- (1) The agency's accreditation standards effectively address the quality of the institution or program in the following areas:**

(i) Success with respect to student achievement in relation to the institution's mission, which may include different standards for different institutions or programs, as established by the institution, including, as appropriate, consideration of course completion, State licensing examination, and job placement rates.

Previous Issue or Problem:

During its 2007 review of the agency, Department staff noted that ACOE had clarified its expectations regarding the professional optometric degree programs with respect to licensure. Specifically, the agency required itself to "review a professional optometric degree program that has less than a 70% ultimate pass rate for three consecutive years on the National Board of Examiners in Optometry (NBEO) examination. The calculation is to be based on the number of students who have attempted all parts of the NBEO examination by the time of graduation."

In addition, the agency had established procedures to collect the required licensure data by means of the annual report process. However, in order to meet the requirements of this section of the criteria, ACOE still needed to demonstrate that it had actually collected and assessed the licensure data.

Agency Response and Discussion:

In response, the current report demonstrated that ACOE has been collecting the licensure pass rate data from its professional optometric degree programs and has been performing its assessment of the data since June 2008, as required by the ACOE policy previously quoted.

The agency's response noted that, so far, one program fell below the 70% ultimate pass rate threshold for three consecutive years. As a result, the agency conducted an interim visit to the program for the purpose of assessing the program's compliance with the standards relating to assessment, curriculum, faculty and students. That site visit report was reviewed at the agency's summer 2011 decision meeting, subsequent to its submission of the current compliance

report to the NACIQI. The agency did note, however, that the site visit report indicated that the program had taken a number of corrective actions that included curricular enhancements, strengthening its admission requirements and developing examination preparation courses. In addition, the most recently-compiled data (available subsequent to the site visit) indicated that the program's latest licensure pass rate exceeded 70%.

The documentation provided with the current compliance report included annual report templates (to show the questions that its professional optometric degree program must answer), together with sample correspondence to the affected program. As a result, the agency meets the requirements of this section of the criteria.

PART III: THIRD PARTY COMMENTS

The Department did not receive any written third-party comments regarding this agency.